Synopsis

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From Estrangement to Enlightenment: A Study of Select Works of Leo Tolstoy

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"The greatest discovery in life is self-discovery. Until you find yourself, you will always be someone else. Become yourself."

–Myles Munroe

Literature has been an extremely important aspect in framing civilisations, questioning accepted wisdom, and delving into basic concerns of human life as an intellectual investigation, social criticism, and a medium for personal expression. In the contemporary society it is common to see people who are depressed, alienated, isolated and estranged. This condition of man is due to his ignorance about self and about others. When a man does not follow old beliefs blindly and starts analysing things by questioning them he is considered a sceptic. He is able to differentiate between the good and the bad and his rational thinking along with his intellect; helps him to understand his own self. This self-realisation paves the way for his transformation, and he contributes his mite to the development of the society. His self-realisation and transformation make him understand the need to connect with nature and he becomes the "enlightened one."

Russian literature has a significant place in world literature with the authors contributing to diverse genres including areas like philosophy, psychology and spirituality. The themes explored encompass self-realisation, quest for the meaning of life, existential inquiries, ethical quandaries, the intricacies of the human psyche, and the stark realities of existence, morality, humanity and so on. The literary contributions of Russian authors captivated a global audience through their deep philosophical echoes.

In an era of rapid technological growth and altering global dynamics, one would wonder what role a 19th-century Russian writer could possibly play in the

contemporary context; but the reading of Leo Tolstoy's works will convince the readers that his ideas and his timeless wisdom would continue to reverberate with amazing strength and power, providing insights that are strikingly appropriate to the present complex world.

The lasting legacy of the literary giant Leo Tolstoy, best known for his epic novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina,* was more than just a storyteller. He was a social critic, a philosopher, and a moral thinker whose views defied the customs and conventions of his day and continue to mould the thoughts of the readers. One cannot analyse Tolstoy's significance without referring to his magnum opus, *War and Peace*. Set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars, this voluminous novel provides a War and Peace interpretation that goes beyond its historical context. Tolstoy's depiction of the senselessness and chaos of war is very much pertinent in today's world of unending global conflicts.

Tolstoy's view of history as a vast, interrelated web of events and people is consistent with current knowledge of global systems. In a world fraught with international tensions and the threat of warfare, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* becomes relevant today offering insights into the human condition, nature of war, and the much needed peace. Towards the end of his writing career, Tolstoy grappled intensely with questions concerning faith, morality, and the meaning of life and this spiritual crisis and the ensuing philosophical evolution reflect the existential problems faced by many people in the society.

Tolstoy's emphasis on living in the present moment foreshadows contemporary mindfulness techniques. Tolstoy's oeuvre is integral to the wider heritage of Russian literature's impact on global politics. The ethical influence and psychological depth of Russian literature have enthralled global readers, shaping political ideologies and cultural understanding. The significance of Tolstoy scholarship today is particularly needed as his philosophical insights provide a counterpoint to the modern society's materialistic attitude and superficial values. Tolstoy's experimental school at Yasnaya Polyana and his writings

related to education, advocate a student-centered approach that is consistent with current progressive educational theories.

The significance of Tolstoy in the 21st century is becoming increasingly evident as his concepts provide ethical guidance and a source of wisdom in a world frequently deficient in both. In a world confronted by issues of war and peace, search for meaning of life, and struggle for social justice, Tolstoy's voice resonates through the ages, remaining pertinent and motivational. His works encompass not just exquisite prose, but also a call to action to live with greater awareness, to extend compassion to others, and to perpetually interrogate the world around us. Tolstoy's promotion of simplicity and living in harmony with nature corresponds with contemporary environmental initiatives in the face of the environmental crisis.

Leo Tolstoy, a magnificent writer and the greatest author of all times, excelled in the usage of all the above mentioned themes. His works serve the purpose of enlightening the minds of readers with his insights. Reconnecting with his deep acumen gives the readers a sense of refreshment and soul satisfaction. The study highlights the themes of dogmatism, scepticism, self-realisation, transformation and man's connect with nature and the philosophy of art. It discusses how the characters in the select works of Tolstoy, who are estranged due to various reasons and external factors, embark on a journey towards enlightenment. Their journey is vividly examined and analysed.

There are many theses, articles, books, book chapters and reviews on Tolstoy's works. All the available theses, articles and book chapters deal with the issues of feminism, portrayal of women characters, psychological analysis of the characters, spiritual and religious themes, and societal issues with the application of Marxist study, non-violence, humanitarianism and sentimentalism. There are a few studies comparing Tolstoy with Gandhi, Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary and Thomas Hardy. Much attention has not been given to the analysis of

characters based on Transformation Learning theory and Murray Bookchin's Social Ecology Theory. Hence, the present study addresses the research gap.

Primary Sources:

1. *Family Happiness* (1859)
2. *War and Peace* (1867)
3. *Anna Karenina* (1878)
4. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886)
5. *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889)
6. *What is Art?* (1898)
7. *Resurrection* (1899)

Chapterisation:

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Overview of Dogmatism and Scepticism

Chapter III: Self-realisation and Transformation

Chapter IV: Man in Harmony with Nature

Chapter V: Conclusion

Objectives

- To analyse the difference between dogmatism and scepticism through the characters of the selected works
- To study the journey of the characters' towards self-realisation and transformation
- To stress on the need to return to nature for a harmonious life
- To understand Tolstoy's philosophy of Art

Thesis Statement

The present study aims to analyse the characters in select works of Leo Tolstoy as they embark on a journey from estrangement to enlightenment, progressing through inquiry towards self-realisation and transformation, and by reconnecting with nature for a harmonious living.

Chapter I

This introductory chapter gives a brief introduction to Russian literature, rationale for the selection of author, bio-critical analysis of Leo Tolstoy, the main themes in his major works, and his place among contemporary writers. Caryl Emerson in the work, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature* comments on Russian literature as:

> Russian literature is compact, intensely self-reflexive, and always about to forget that it is merely made up out of words. Imagined characters walk out of fiction into real life, while real-life writers are raised to the status of myth. Myths consolidated first around saints, then around cities (St. Petersburg and Moscow), then around biographies of writers, finally around ethical and ideological systems. When measured against the subcontinents – Europe and Asia proper – that flank Russia to the west, south, and east, this tradition is remarkable in two respects: its extreme brevity, and its lateness. (1)

The richness of Russian literature is brought out by Caryl in this work. Further, the chapter discusses the concepts of estrangement and enlightenment. The contemporary relevance, the need for the study, introduction of the primary sources, a review of literature, objectives of the study, research methodology and chapterisation are given in this chapter.

Research Methodology

A few concepts of Dogmatism and Skepticism are used in Chapter II; concepts of Self-realisation and Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory are used in Chapter

III, and for nature connectedness, the theory of Social Ecology by Murray Bookchin is used in Chapter IV, and Tolstoy's Philosophy of Art is discussed in Chapter V. *MLA Handbook Ninth Edition* is used for Documentation.

Chapter II

Chapter two entitled "Overview of Scepticism and Dogmatism," deals with the difference between the concepts of Dogmatism and Scepticism. The characters in the select works are scrutinised on the basis of their dogmatic and sceptic nature and behaviours. Tolstoy is well known for his swing between Dogmatism and Scepticism. Dogmatism is the rigid compliance to ideas and beliefs that are frequently not factual. A dogmatic person sticks to his opinions and beliefs, without bothering about the truth in them. For example patriarchy is a system which is followed even today.

Scepticism on the other hand is concerned with doubting and questioning things before following them. It requires evidence, reasoning and proof. In the novella, *Family Happiness*, the character Masha, a young woman who fantasises marriage, is dogmatic and has great expectations from her husband thinking that marriage is a combination of romance, uninterrupted attention and bliss. To her disappointment she ends up understanding the harsh reality of life and learns that life is much more than a romantic marriage with a loving partner. Her dogmatic approach to life would have ruined her but for her timely realisation; when she understood the stark reality, her expectations became less and she started taking care of herself. The chapter emphasises the need to develop a spirit of enquiry and the need to be sceptical. It further encourages individuals to exercise wisdom and comprehend the rationale behind one's beliefs and actions.

Chapter III

The chapter Self-realisation and Transformation is concerned with the necessity of realising the self and the metamorphosis that follows. The process of self-realisation is

shedding of one's ego and analysing the whole being. It is necessary for the development and growth of a person. The characters coming to terms with their identity, as well as the transformation of the characters in the respective works, are addressed in this chapter. The transformation after the process of self-realisation is mitigated by various factors like advice, loss, existential crisis, rejections and sometimes even trauma. The characters have a tendency to become aware of their selves and to question not just their existence but also the reason for their existence.

In this way, the characters are able to get rid of their ignorant behaviour, which affords them the opportunity to conduct an in-depth investigation of their own inner selves. This prepares the way for the characters to undergo a transition that is in accordance with their self-realisation, allowing them to leave behind their old unwanted characteristics and behaviours that have caused them to experience pain in difficult and challenging circumstances in their lives. Through the light of the concept of self-realisation by Keran Horney and Transformative Learning theory by Jack Mezirow, the characters are analysed.

Chapter IV

The chapter "Man in Harmony with Nature" highlights the association of humans and nature emphasising the need for man to reconnect with nature for sustainability. The select works are analysed applying Murray Bookchin's Social Ecology theory. It is evident that man, creating social structures and hierarchical differences, subsequently dominates nature also. That is the subjugation of man to man creates an anthropocentric idea of man exploiting nature also. Treating fellow beings equally and with respect paves the way for man to treat nature in a similar manner. Nature teaches unity to human beings, whereas man creates divisions and inequality. All creatures are treated equally by nature, but because of man's greed along with unequal social structures, humans frequently bring about inequality.

This chapter, with the application of Social Ecology theory, provides an explanation of the philosophical, psychological, and ecological concepts that are brought together to discuss the relationship between humans and the natural world. It illustrates the many facets of human exploitation and the destruction of land which is interconnected with one another. Additionally, the preservation of land is accentuated through paving way for conservation of nature. It becomes evident that the only way for humanity to achieve harmony is to align with nature where peace and solace are available abundantly.

Chapter V

The Fifth chapter is the conclusion and summation of the study. It provides the chapter wise summary of all the five chapters. It discusses the ideas of art based on Tolstoy's what is Art? Further, it discusses the relevance of the study, key findings, limitations of the study, scope for further study. The research on the journey of a person from estrangement to enlightenment incorporating a sceptical stance, progress towards self-realisation, transformation and the need to connect with nature for a harmonious living is highly relevant in the modern world where things are falling apart. This chapter brings forth the findings of the study.

Key Findings

The findings of the research are as follows. It is explored how important it is for individuals to critically examine and rationalise their own ideas and beliefs. The study highlights the significance of an individual's ability to gain an understanding of one self. The evaluation of one's own self as well as the possibility for personal reform can positively contribute to the advancement of both individual and the society. Individuals are obligated to make an effort to comprehend the complex and multifaceted qualities of the natural world. Additionally, this highlights the prevalent inequality that exists within society and provides a critical analysis of the hierarchies and the dominance of one human over another, which

ultimately leads to the degradation of the natural world as well. A strong emphasis is placed on the recognition of the true substance of art as a potent medium for communicating human feelings and promoting the principles of universal brotherhood and compassion for one another. The development of human values and ethical principles ought to be facilitated through the medium of art. In addition to this, the significance of living a simple life is emphasised, as people frequently prioritise the acquisition of material pleasure throughout their lives, while disregarding their more fundamental inner needs. Rather than an individual obsessively pursuing material gain and accumulation, which frequently becomes the dominant focus of life, an individual who embraces a life of simplicity is more likely to possess the fundamental necessities for leading a serene life.

Though Tolstoy is a 19th century author, his philosophies and insights are relevant even in the 21st century. His works are timeless and have the capacity to capture the minds of people. His realistic writings are very relevant to everyone living in this modern era which becomes one of the reasons for his global reach and recognition. His ideal of non-violence is relevant to the present day war scenario in the world. His socially reforming novels and essays provide the readers with ideas to lead a purposeful life understanding the meaning of life. A person who has come across Tolstoy's insights in his life would definitely have a different approach to life. Through Tolstoy's scholarship, the basic human qualities are instilled in a person who changes his views and perspectives on the world and life itself. In the later years, the affluent Tolstoy disregarded his noble Russian ancestry and dressed like a peasant. He felt that materialistic wealth is no wealth but rather the knowledge and understanding of realities of life is what makes a man wealthy. Tolstoy lived as an example to all the principles and ideas that he preached. It was not only in written form but the man lived a life as a source of inspiration to many. Many writers such as Viriginia Woolf, William Faulkner, George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, James

Joyce and so on were very much inspired by his philosophical insights that showed depth in the human emotions and life of man. That is the reason even after ages Tolstoy had been admired and cherished by people even today. His philosophical insights on life, love, family, relationships, inner self, non-violence, connectivity to nature and so on are the true treasure that he had left behind for yet more generations to come. Is it obvious that even after few decades one may see people having admiration for Tolstoy and reading his works for gaining insights on the above-mentioned factors.

Scope for further study

Tolstoy's works can be researched using various aspects. An eco-spiritualistic study can be taken up, for there are more spiritualistic elements specified by Tolstoy in his works. Research on eco-feminism can be done to strongly emphasise the connection between nature and women which is prominent in his works. Health humanities can be taken up for research since the portrayal of certain characters relates to physical and mental health issues. A full-fledged Ecocritical study is possible in the works of Tolstoy for he concentrates more on nature in relation to humans. Gender centric study can be taken up and explored through the characters. Thanatological studies can be taken up for further research as Tolstoy's works deal with death and the dying. This stream of studies gives various outcomes when worked on in the works of Tolstoy. A masculine study can be done based on the male characters and their psychological, physical and spiritual struggles can be brought out in the study.

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